

My California nite: The amazing **David Kipen** sent this dispatch from last night (August 27) at Book Passage:

The *My California* Traveling Book Tour and Medicine Show fetched up in the Bay Area last night, spreading good cheer and doing land-office business at the sprawling Book Passage compound in Corte Madera. Contributors **Michael Chabon**, **Kathi Kamen Goldmark**, **Mary Mackey** and me all read and regaled before a crowd of eager patrons. All bought some. Some tried to buy all. **Barbara George** of the state Arts Council — the beneficiary of the *My California* project — got the evening off to a sobering start by retailing some of the performances California was already missing, thanks to recent budget cuts.

Her reference to a certain “Chinese harp and bamboo flute troupe” then became an improbable running joke for the evening, as Goldmark (“California Honky-Tonk”) and Sam Barry took the dais for a regrettably flute-free torch number. They scratched their original plan to sing Jimmy Buffett’s “Why Don’t We Get Drunk and Screw” in deference to some managerial squeamishness, but Goldmark managed to work the title into her intro more times than it actually appears in the song. (Incidentally, we’re promised that work continues on Goldmark’s eagerly awaited literary Buffett pastiche, entitled “Why Don’t We Get Strunk & White?”)

Mackey, meanwhile, gave Sacramento its due with a too-short snatch of her essay “The Distant Cataract About Which We Do Not Speak,” about living a walk away from both the American River and the Golden State Freeway. Last up, buoyed by impending publication of his new novella *The Final Solution* (think Conan Doyle’s *The Final Problem*), a gracious Chabon confided that his hymn to Berkeley in *My California* had been a hit with the neighbors. After the piece first ran in *Gourmet* magazine, the henhouse down the block delivered a basket of half a dozen freshly laid eggs to his doorstep, complete with a picture of the entire flock posing around a copy of the issue in question.

Later, after the signing line abated, a hardy remnant adjourned across the way to Izzy’s for grub, grog and a little polite arm-twisting about *My California* events yet to come...

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